

Minutes
Nevada Organic Advisory Council Meeting
5 May 2006
Nevada Department of Agriculture
350 Capitol Hill Avenue
Reno NV

Organic Advisory Council Members in Attendance:

Virginia Johnson, Marcia Litsinger, Sharon Davidson, Bruce Quinlan

Members Absent:

Carl Newberry, Dave Hall

Members of the Public:

Tom Stille, Steve Slusser, Steve Litsinger, Mary Jo Rablin, Bob Rewinkle, Ray Johnson, Karen Grillo

NDOA staff: Gary Cross, Organic Program Manager; Peggy McKie, Organic Program Inspector

1. 10:00 a.m. Call to order by Chairwoman Johnson

2. Introductions

2(A,B) Introductions: New council member Sharon Davidson was introduced.

2(C). Public Participation

Tom Stille, public, introduced the "ESA" concept – Employee Supported Agriculture, an idea that he is planning to develop through his business "Interpretive Gardens/River School".

He also discussed the developing Great Basin Food Basket cooperative and how the farmers and founders envision it. The cooperative consists of four local farmers and a group of subscription buyers. Preference is being given to organic produce. There are currently four farmers involved: Home Grown Nevada, Lattin Farms, Sod-Buster Farm, and Sierra Valley Farm. The cooperative hopes to eventually attain up to 100 members. They plan to have three pick-up locations in Reno/Sparks area. Marcia Litsinger explained that the cooperative will be a "consumer-based" CSA rather than the more traditional "farmer based" CSA.

Stille also discussed the future of Sage Winds garden, in which food for the Food Bank is being grown. The property is being sold and the garden may have to be moved. The Food Bank hopes to move the garden to a permanent location and incorporate hoop houses.

Stille's "River School" is now offering organic/sustainable gardening classes for "fun and profit" to the public. All topics will be taught from an organic production perspective. Certified organic farmers Steve and Marcia Litsinger are currently teaching one of the classes.

[Subsequent items on the agenda were taken out of order at the request of Chairwoman Johnson because one council member was late and a quorum was not established. A quorum was established during discussion of item 3(C)]

3. Old Business

3(C). Genetically Modified Crops (GMO). Cross explained that Nevada does not require notification of the planting or sale of genetically modified crops unless the seed from such fields will be sold as "certified seed". Some growers of certified alfalfa seed will be producing GMO ("Round-Up Ready") alfalfa in Nevada this year. Alfalfa hay produced on these fields may also be sold and does not have to be identified as "genetically modified". If the GMO alfalfa seed is planted solely for hay production, NDOA does not require registration of the fields. NDOA regulations require that there be 600 feet between foundation seed fields and adjacent non-certified fields to protect the identity of the certified seed. There are no such requirements for distances between other types of GMO and non-GMO crops.

Virginia Johnson stated that organic farmers must be allowed to know where these fields are being planted so that they do not plant similar crops that could become contaminated with GMO pollen, etc. Gary Cross stated that he is allowed to provide the names of the farms and the location of the fields, but cannot disclose the number of acres as this is currently considered proprietary business information. Virginia asked what NDOA do if an adjacent GMO crop contaminates an organic field and/or what would an organic grower's recourse be if an organic crop is contaminated? Cross replied that it would have to be investigated on a case-by-case basis according to National Organic Program guidelines.

Discussion followed about what the public can do more to demand transparency.

A motion was made to form a committee focused on developing legislation aimed at offering organic farmers some recourse should GMO-contamination occur to their crops and from lawsuits that could result from such contamination. The committee will develop this legislation by 15 September 2006 and bring it back to the council for discussion and/or approval at their next meeting. The motion carried. Marcia Litsinger. Bruce Quinlan and Sharon Davidson, and Ray Johnson volunteered to assist.

3(A). Approval of minutes. The minutes were approved without comment or corrections.

3(B)(1). Budget Discussion. Handouts detailed the projected budget for the organic program in the coming years. Cross went over the proposed changes to Nevada's organic regulations that would increase program fees. Cross introduced the "revised" proposed gross fee structure that came as a result of comments collected during the workshop. No action was taken on this item.

3(B)(2). Agriculture Council of Nevada. McKie reported that the Agriculture Council of Nevada approved a sum of \$1,500.00 for the Organic Advisory Council for publishing costs for the Nevada Organic Review (NOR). Ed Foster from NDOA told McKie that he needed to contact the Ag. Council to make sure that the funds had been transferred from the Department to Ag. Council for disbursement to the Organic Council. No action was taken on this item.

3(B)(3) . Senator McGuinness support. The Council has a sponsor for a bill draft request for next legislative session, funds from which would support Council activities. Karen Grillo recommended that the council determine first exactly what the funds will be used for. Members of the budget committee then discussed developing a budget for the legislative funds which could include funding for educational efforts, a display board, promotional activities, brochures, organic farm map, per diem for council (4), the NOR and 2 – 1 day workshops north and south. No action was taken on this item.

3(B)(4). Grants. Karen Grillo, Nevada Association of Counties, stated that each state will receive \$100,00.00 for specialty crops for fruit, vegetables, nuts, nursery through AMS Specialty Crops grants. States will apply for the money, states will release grants to applicants. Funds probably won't be available until late in 2006. No action taken on this item.

12:30 Break for lunch.

1:30 p.m. Reconvened.

Old Business (continued)

3(B)(5). Not-for-Profit Status for Council. Discussion followed exploring the formation of a non-profit and/or organic support association to supplement Council activities. Cross volunteered to look into the requirements for 501c3. He asked the council to determine what the focus of the 501c3 would be. A motion was made to research forming a non-profit such as "friends of the organic council association" and report back at the next meeting of the Council. Motion seconded and carried. Johnson, Cross, and Quinlan volunteered to be on a committee.

4. Staff Updates

4(A) The results of recent Workshop and Hearing for changes to the organic regulations were discussed during the agenda item #3(B)(1). No action was taken on this item.

4(B) Organic Program Website. McKie requested that council members forward to her ideas for updating the program website. She asked that the ideas be submitted before July 1st. No action was taken.

4(C). McKie reviewed observations made during inspections in the past year. The use of non-organic seed was still an issue, this being the most common among alfalfa producers, and a universal lack of adequate compost production records. She said record keeping practices were adequate overall, but needed improvement by some growers. She explained that that processors/handlers take the most time for both inspection and follow-up activities such as label and ingredient approvals.

5. New Business

5(A) Nevada Organic Review. Litsinger assumed chair duties for this discussion because Johnson has been previously been paid to edit the NOR and would like to do so again. No action could be taken as a result because a quorum was not then present. Discussion followed about the cost in money and time to produce the NOR. The option to publish the NOR on-line was explored, mailing hardcopies only to those who request it, and printing a minimum of copies for display/upon request. It was generally agreed that this would result in less time needed to print, fold and mail, reducing the printed numbers to about 100 from about 300. No action was taken.

5(B). Future council vacancies. Johnson asked if a list of possible candidates for future council vacancies should be developed. After discussion it was determined that a list wasn't necessary. Johnson introduced discussion about replacing current council member Carl Newberry because he has missed more than four meetings and according to council bylaws should be replaced. A motion was made to authorize Johnson to send a letter to Mr. Newberry recognizing his past service and notifying him that the council has taken action to replace him. The motion seconded and carried.

5(C). No discussion or action taken on this item

5(D). Next meeting scheduled for October 13th 9:00 a.m. the location to be determined.

Submitted: P. McKie (NDOA staff)